

SIR JOHN GIELGUD



Sir John Gielgud, eminent British stage and screen actor, brings a special dignity and strength to the role of Nerva, the noble Roman senator in *Caligula*. As Nerva, he makes a powerful statement against the corruption of Tiberius' reign by preferring the Roman way of death by suicide to continuing life under Tiberius' expected successor, Caligula. During a dramatic moment in the film, Sir John takes his life in his bath. "It's really quite a lovely scene," he said.

This was Gielgud's second screen role in Italy during his career. The first took one day of shooting during which he lay in a coffin as the dead Pope in *The Shoes of the Fisherman*. "Coffins are warmer than Roman bathtubs," Gielgud noted.

The British theater has no more distinguished performer. Sir John's career has been concentrated largely on the theater stages of Britain and America where he received accolades for acting in and directing a prodigious body of classical and modern plays. During these years, Sir John found time to take on a number of film roles, sometimes in a leading assignment but quite often in a cameo role. His contribution invariably has given such films a distinction they would not otherwise have had.

In 1976, the actor-knight was honored with the British Academy Award of Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of the suave butler in *Murder on the Orient Express*. He was nominated for an American Academy Award in 1964 as Best Supporting Actor in *Becket*, in which he appeared with his *Caligula* co-star, Peter O'Toole. Among his more famous early films are Alfred Hitchcock's *Secret Agent* (1936), *Richard III* (1955), *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956), *The Loved One* (1965), Orson Welles' *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968), Sir Richard Attenborough's *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969), *Lost Horizon* (1973), *11 Harrowhouse* (1974), *Joseph Andrews* (1977) and Bob Clark's *Murder by Decree* (1979). He appeared with Malcolm McDowell in *Aces High* (1976) and was the houseguest of the 34-year-old *Caligula* star during his stay in Rome. Twice before his portrayal of Nerva, Sir John appeared in Roman togas on the screen – once as Cassius in the American version of *Julius Caesar* (1953) and then as Caesar in the 1970 British version.

Born in London on April 14, 1904, Sir John joined the Old Vic in 1921 as a Royal Academy of Dramatic Art scholarship student. He has played all the great classical roles in London and New York, including Romeo, Richard II, Marc Antony, Hamlet and King Lear. He has enjoyed equal success in other productions, including *The School for Scandal*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Constant Nymph* and *Crime and Punishment*. One of his greatest triumphs, *Ages of Man*, a recital of speeches from Shakespeare, premiered in America. Sir John also directed plays for Helen Hayes (*The Glass Menagerie*), Maggie Smith (*Private Lives*) and Ingrid Bergman (*The Constant Wife*). He received an honorary doctorate of law and literature, became a Companion of the French Legion of Honor and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1963.

Gielgud's prodigious film work after *Caligula* includes roles in such films as David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Chariots of Fire* (1981), *Arthur* (1981), TV's *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), *Gandhi* (1982), *Plenty* (1985), Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), *The Power of One* (1992), *First Knight* (1995), *Haunted* (1995), *Shine* (1995), Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996), and *Elizabeth* (1998). He passed away on May 21, 2000.